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TITLE: Technical Assistance Online: HIV/AIDS and School Health Resources from the National School Boards Association

AUTHORS: Adkison, C; Grebow, P

ISSUE: Up-to-date policies, curricula, and other resources for school-based HIV prevention can be difficult to obtain and interpret. Individuals interested in these issues benefit from knowledge of what other states and districts have found successful and from research-based information on the types of policies, programs, and approaches likely to be most effective.

SETTING: Access to the Internet is becoming more widespread in schools and homes across the country. Anyone with an interest in school-based HIV prevention or other school health issues can use NSBA's free online resources from any computer with Internet access.

PROJECT: The School Health Resource Database at the National School Boards Association contains more than 2,700 school policies, curricula, research articles, teaching guides, and other materials related to HIV prevention and other school health issues. Since 1987, project staff has provided technical assistance by collecting and reviewing materials and fulfilling specific requests for information. A description of the project has been available on the Internet since 1997, and individuals have been able to submit requests online since 1998. In 1999, the information available online was significantly enhanced to include abstracts of selected high-quality, commonly requested materials on HIV prevention and other school health topics, documents published by NSBA that can be downloaded, and referrals to other organizations and agencies. Users gain a greater understanding of the types and quality of resources available and may also gain a clearer definition of their individual needs.

RESULTS: Between January 1998 and March 1999, the project has received more than 170 requests via email and the online request form, representing approximately one-third of the total requests during that time—and the percentage of people using these formats is growing. The project's expanded presence on the Internet has increased the visibility of the project and added greater flexibility in the manner in which resources may be obtained from project staff. It is anticipated that with the promotion of the project's site, the number of people accessing resources will increase significantly during the next year.

LESSONS LEARNED: With the enhanced capacity to provide resources via the Internet, project staff has been able to reach a wider range of people interested in school health issues who have instant access to important information and resources. However, project staff have also realized that with this technology comes an even greater need to provide specialized personal assistance in interpreting materials, addressing specific district and community needs, and continuing to meet the needs of those who contact project staff in other ways.

PRESENTER CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Cameron Adkison (Project Associate) and Pamela Grebow (Research Coordinator)

Address: National School Boards Association

1680 Duke Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

Telephone: (703) 838-6722

Fax: (703) 548-5516

Email: cadkison@nsba.org / pgrebow@nsba.org